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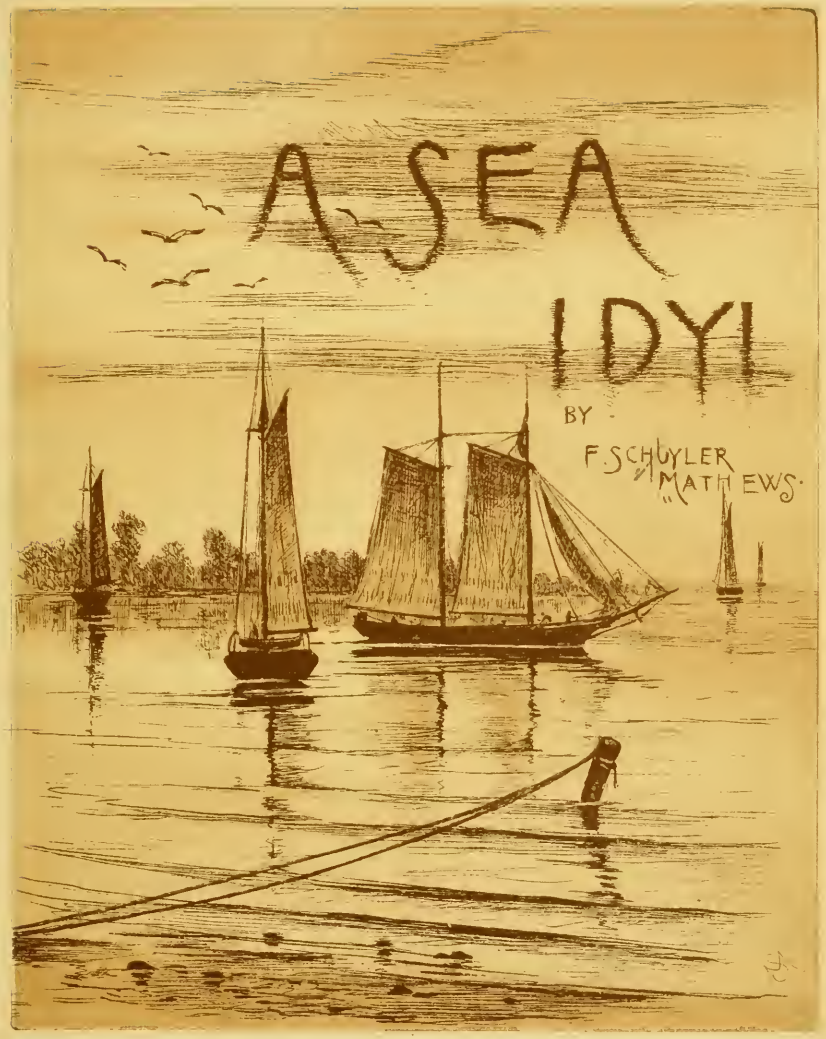

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"These idle vessels lingering here,
And floating on the listless tide."

A SEA IDYL

BY

F. SCHUYLER MATHEWS

MAIDEN.

Sing me a song, O sea,
What may thy music be?

Sing wind, sing wave;
Blow soft, come lave
My waiting feet,
And summer's heat
Dispel ye both by cool caress.

Far from the beach,
Beyond the reach
Of harbor lights
And land-locked sights
Ye both do come with fresh'ning life.

Blow softly, wind,
My ear's inclined
To catch thy song.
Come, sing; I long
To hear what music sweet is thine

" But every sail I drive before
My path in scurrying, bounding haste."

WIND.

Mine?
Wouldst hear my tune?
Dost know the boon
Is worthless, thou
Who knowest how
To sing? What voice more sweet than thine?

MAIDEN.

Thy voice. Sing thou;
I cannot now.

WIND.

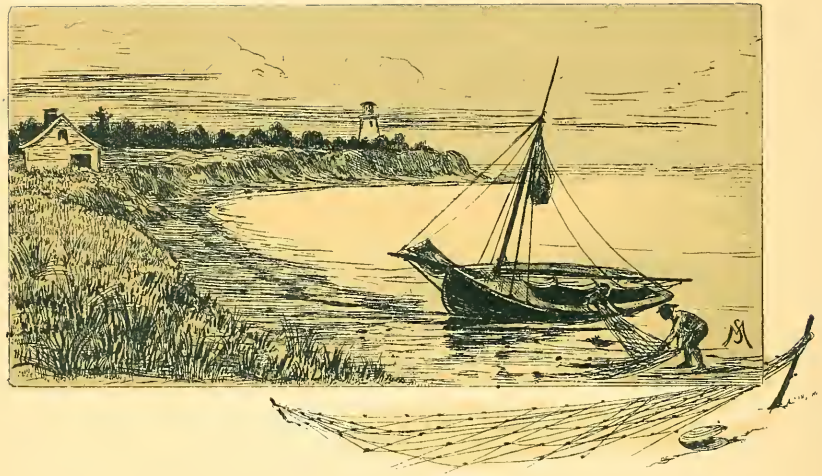
Then listen. I
Will sing and try
To tell thee what great things I do!

SONG.

These idle vessels lingering here,
  And floating on the listless tide,
They know my savage strength, and fear
  To meet me on the ocean wide.

I flap and sway their canvas now,
  And gently toy with jib and stay.
So slowly moves each vessel's prow,
  Its rippled wake scarce marks the bay.

But let these petty craft beware
  My anger on the open sea;
My power and will are regal there,
  And sail like these are chaff to me!



"The fisherman his boat has beached."

I brook no canvas in my path,
  Bare poles I snap like pipe-stems slight.
I lash the sea to foaming wrath,
  And beat it fairly black and white.

The fisher boats from Gloucester shore
  In blustering days my power have faced.
But every sail I drive before
  My path in scurrying, bounding haste.

The fisherman his boat has beached;
  He spreads his nets, and thanks his stars
For storm outlived, and haven reached.
  Ah, how they fear me—bravest tars!

My song, dear maiden, thou dost see,
Breathes other words than those of love;
Shows some of passion's fire in me,
But passion not of turtle-dove.

But when I stroke thy golden hair,
And whisper softly in thy ear,
Thou knowest me in weather fair,
I kiss thy brow. Thou'st naught to fear.

MAIDEN.

O treacherous wind,
Not always kind,
I know the wave
My feet doth lave
Can sing a kinder, gentler song.

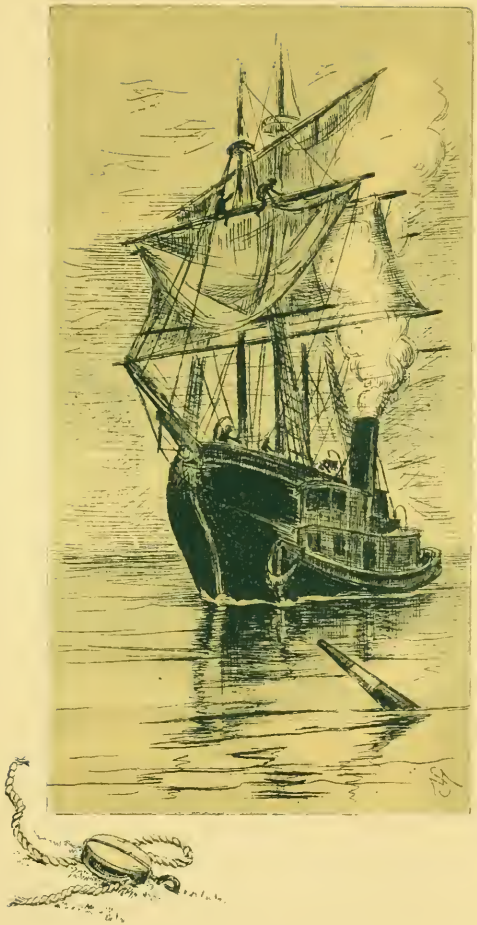
WAVE.

My song?
Thou'rt wrong.
Dear Maiden, listen.

SONG.

On the yellow pebbled margin of the beach
I do reach
Ever forward, ever farther; I aspire
To be higher.
Back again my restless footsteps always slide
As I glide,
Slipping, rippling back and forward. It is plain
I remain

Just precisely where I started in my way,
Each new day.
But this gliding, dancing motion I repeat
At thy feet,
Dainty maiden, is for me but idle play
Through the day.
Life has very different phases out at sea;
And for me,
I prefer to roll in mountains, though the wind,
So unkind,
Sometimes lashes me to fury, and I fly
At his eye
With the whitest rows of teeth upon my crest,
Showing best



"And when giant ships are towing to the quay."

How I angrily resent his churlish sport,

And retort

In a blinding cloud of spray flung in his face.

Then I race

In a close and hot pursuit to trip his heels

As he deals

Harder strokes across my face in vicious spite—

Heartless sprite.

Then, if vessel tempest-driven I espy,

I will fly

Quickly thither, that my vengeance I may wreck

On her deck.

Heavy seas and crushing breakers soon will clear

All loose gear.

Every spar, and rope, and luckless sailor there,
Ill will fare.
But I am not raging always, thou mayst see
I can be
Quite as gentle as a maiden could desire
Or require.
Frequently I shimmer gayly in the sun,
When I've done
With my wild and boisterous revels out at sea
Where I'm free.
And when giant ships are towing to the quay,
I will be
There to clear the way before a gallant bark,
Looming dark

"Where the dory lies neglected on the sand."

Thro' the early morning's mist, and water's gray
Of the bay.
Where the dory lies neglected on the sand,
I'm at hand
Lapping idly, playing lightly at its side
With the tide.
When the sunset-light is golden o'er the bay,
And the day
Is declining in a glorious afterglow,
I sing low
To the pebbles on the beach a lullaby,
Lullaby.
Dearest maiden, would you trust me now at sea,
Where I'm free?

MAIDEN.

Ah! wave and wind,
Ye here are kind,
But out at sea
I'll ne'er trust ye.
These songs betray your treachery!

"When the sunset-light is golden o'er the bay."

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